

GOD WITH US
Part 1: The Great Blessing
Genesis – Deuteronomy

Message 6 – Moses: The Exodus of Israel from Egypt
Exodus 1-18

Introduction

The book of Exodus, volume 2 of the Pentateuch, develops the story that Genesis began. Exodus shows the outworking of the *nation* aspect of the 4-part covenant God made with Abraham: A great *nation*, a great land, a great name, and a great blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). Over the 430-year stay in Egypt, the family of Jacob became the nation of Israel. With His mighty hand, God will bring His chosen nation out from within another nation and He will enter into a unique covenant relationship with them. He will give them His laws and make His dwelling among them.

Yet, God's greater purpose in forming this one nation was to make them a *great blessing to all nations*. The key to understanding Exodus, then, is found in the words God spoke to Israel at Mt. Sinai, in the preamble to the commandments:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (19:4-6).

By means of living under God's laws and exhibiting His character to the world, Israel was to become a *“kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* All nations on earth would have access to the living God through the witness of the people of Israel.

From a theological perspective, Exodus greatly advances our understanding of God – His nature and His purposes. Direct encounters with God reveal much about His character (chs.3, 6, 33, 34). He reveals to Moses His special name; Yahweh. His attributes of justice, truthfulness, mercy, faithfulness, and holiness are highlighted. For the first time, we receive a detailed description of His laws, by which Israel was to live and thus represent God to the world. The foundation of biblical ethics and morality is laid out for us. We also have here an introduction into the nature of true worship, as God gives to Israel detailed

instructions for the tabernacle in which He will dwell. Man is taught not just how to *build* God's house; but more importantly, the proper ways to *approach* this holy God. Sinful man can only come to God through an act of substitute sacrifice. Finally, the biblical theme, *God With Us*, comes into clear view at the end of Exodus, as God's presence descends into the camp of Israel so that He can make His dwelling among men.

The oppression of Israel in Egypt: 1:1-22

Exodus opens by briefly recounting the 70 descendants of Jacob who came down into Egypt at the end of Genesis (Exodus 1:1-6). Clearly, Exodus is "chapter 2" of the story that began in Genesis. Israel has grown into a vast nation during 350+ years of captivity in Egypt:

"But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them" (1:7).

The key information in Exodus 1 is that a new Pharaoh arose over Egypt who was fearful, rather than favorable, toward the growing number of Israelites. His policy was to oppress and enslave them, rather than to bless them as the earlier Pharaoh had done (Genesis 47-50). Not only did this new Pharaoh inflict the Israelites with bitter labor (1:14), he also sought to stem the tide of Israel's rapid numerical growth by killing their newborn sons (1:15-22). Yet, God gave the Hebrew midwives the courage to disobey the royal edict and spare the newborn boys. In turn, God blessed the midwives for their obedience.

When confronted with the choice to obey man or God, the apostles said: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Similarly, the midwives lied to Pharaoh, yet they are praised and rewarded for obeying God. "Their reverence for life reflected a reverence for God." Expositor's Bible Commentary, 2:306.

The early life of Moses: 2:1-10

At birth, Moses was one of the Hebrew infants that Pharaoh sought to destroy; but he was saved due to the courage and wisdom of his mother and sister, and the motherly compassion of Pharaoh's daughter. Ironically, the future deliverer of Israel and archrival of Pharaoh ended up being raised in the house of Pharaoh's daughter!

Brave women of faith play a key role in Exodus. Without these women trusting God and taking huge risks, it is unlikely (humanly speaking) that the story would have played out as it did. Some of the greatest women in the Bible had to give up their babies “by faith” in God: Moses’ mother, Jochebed – Samuel’s mother, Hannah – Jesus’ mother, Mary. In each case, a great deliverer emerged because these women gave their children back to God for His purposes.

Moses’ first attempt to deliver Israel: 2:11-25

The story jumps forward to narrate how Moses the adult *tried unsuccessfully* to become a savior for his people. From the N.T. book of Acts we learn that Moses was 40 years old when these events occurred (Acts 7:23). One day, he struck down an Egyptian who was mistreating a fellow Hebrew. The next day, he attempted to mediate between two Hebrews who were having a dispute. To his dismay, these attempts to fight for his people were rejected.

“Who made you a prince or a judge over us” (2:14)?

In fear of Pharaoh, Moses fled Egypt and settled in the land of Midian, where he would spend the next 40 years as a shepherd. The priest of Midian, Reuel (later, “Jethro”), gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as a wife. In time, a son was born to Moses. He named the son “Gershom” which means “stranger there.” Moses felt like a stranger dwelling in a strange land. Meanwhile, the Israelites in Egypt began to cry out to God for deliverance from their ongoing bondage. The ending of Exodus 2 is significant:

“So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them” (2:24,25).

God heard – God remembered – God saw – God took notice. The promises to the patriarchs are still in effect. Soon, God will move on behalf of Israel in order to fulfill His word.

God’s timing in our lives is notoriously difficult to comprehend. Sometimes we think we are ready to be used. Then, God takes us to the backside of the desert for 40 years. Interestingly - Moses thought he was wasting away on the backside of nowhere. Actually, he was in God’s school of leadership. Little did he know that he would be leading God’s sheep in this same area for the final 40 years of his life.

God's call and Moses' objections: 3:1-4:17

It is significant that the call of God came to Moses *at Mt. Sinai*, where he was pasturing Jethro's flocks. This will be the same place where God enters into a covenant relationship with the nation Israel, after He has drawn them forth from Egyptian bondage. God's call on Moses was immediately tied to the Abrahamic covenant:

“Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God (3:5,6).

God announced His intention to 1) deliver Israel from Egypt and 2) take them to the great land promised to Abraham. Moses immediately balked when God said that He was sending him to Pharaoh to call for the release of Israel from Egypt. Moses raised several objections to God's call on his life.

- Objection #1: Who am I?

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt” (3:11).

God responded that it did not matter *who Moses was*; rather, what mattered was that *God would be with him* and would bring the nation back to this very mountain to worship (3:12).

- Objection #2: Who are YOU?

God gave to Moses *His covenant name* by which He would primarily be known to Israel forever.

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations” (3:14,15).

The verb “I AM” in Hebrew looks like this in English: YHWH. The original Hebrew did not have vowels, only consonants. Much later in history, Jewish scribes created a text of the Old Testament with vowels indicators inserted between the consonants in order to

preserve the proper pronunciation of Hebrew words. Orthodox Jews refrained from speaking the sacred name of God *at all* in fear of violating the 4th commandment, which forbids “*taking the Lord’s name in vain*” (*Exodus 20:7*). Thus, whenever they came to the sacred name YHWH in the text of Scripture, they would speak another name for God, “Adonai,” which means “My gracious Master.” It is most important to note that the name “YHWH” was given by God with this explanation: ***“This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.”***

Jesus incurred the wrath of the religious establishment when He used the sacred name of God, Yahweh (I AM), to refer to Himself. Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple (Jn.8:58,59). He left no doubt as to His claim to be God.

With the divine name in hand, Moses was commanded to go back to Egypt, gather the Jewish elders and announce to them God’s intention to deliver them. God also made it clear to Moses that Pharaoh would not let the Israelites depart without a fight.

“But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go” (3:19,20).

- **Objection #3: What if no one believes that You have appeared to me?**

God gave to Moses certain miracles that he could perform in order to convince Israel to follow his leadership. Most significant is *the staff* of Moses, an implement that would become central to all of the amazing miracles that Moses and Aaron would perform.

The Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he said, “A staff.” Then He said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. But the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail” - so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand - “that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you” (4:2-5).

Note in the narrative that “*a staff*” (v.2) becomes “*the staff of God*” (v.20). God took what Moses had – a shepherd’s staff – and turned it into an instrument of divine power and purpose.

- Objection #4: I am not an eloquent speaker.

Moses continued to resist God's call by insisting that he had *always been* slow of speech and slow of tongue. Interestingly, the New Testament states that earlier in life Moses was "*a man of power in words and deeds*" (Acts 7:22). It appears, therefore, that Moses was trying to find a way out of God's challenging call on his life. God insisted that He would take care of Moses' speech deficiencies.

The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say" (4:11,12).

- Objection #5: Send someone else!

But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will." Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses . . . (4:13,14).

Moses simply does not want to go! In response, God says that He will appoint Aaron, Moses' brother, as his "mouthpiece." Together they will represent God's voice to the elders of Israel and to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Aaron was a good fit to be Moses' spokesman, as he knew well the culture and the people of Israel, while Moses had been separated from his people for 80 years.

So often, we feel unfit to serve God's purposes. I have this weakness, this fear, this doubt, this history, or this sin. Isaiah, when called by God, said: "I am a man of unclean lips!" God used him to be His mouthpiece. Peter, when called by Jesus, said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!" Jesus turned him into a fisher of men. Moses said: "I can't do this!" God said: "I will do it . . . through you." Don't ever think that YOU are the measure of what God can do. The timeless truth is: "Our little becomes much when we place it in the Master's hands."

Moses returns to Egypt: 4:18-31

Moses first told his father-in-law, Jethro, that he was going back to Egypt in order to see how things were going with his brethren. There is no indication at this point that Moses told Jethro the bigger story of God's call on his life. Moses took his wife and sons and headed off for Egypt. On the way, God met Moses at a lodging spot and "*sought to kill him!*"

Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a

flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." So He let him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood" – because of the circumcision (4:24-26).

It appears that Zipporah, Moses' wife, had objected to the circumcision of one of their sons. Moses must have conceded to her wishes and failed to follow through with this critical "*sign of the covenant*" between Yahweh and the descendants of Abraham (see Genesis 17:9-14). He was putting his wife's desires above God's instructions. When Zipporah angrily circumcised the boy, the Lord's hand of discipline was lifted from Moses. Yet, it is clear that a rift over spiritual matters was brewing in the marriage.

Often, a relationship with another human being gets in the way of our relationship with God. This happens as we align our lives with the purposes and desires of that other person, over God. This is why Jesus spoke so strongly about keeping God as the absolute first relationship in our lives (see Matthew 10:37). We cannot possibly follow God if someone else occupies a greater place in our hearts than God Himself.

The final preparatory scene shows Aaron coming to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Moses explained to his brother the call of God on *their* lives. They then proceeded to Egypt where they called together the elders of Israel:

"Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped"(29-31).

The first appearance before Pharaoh: 5:1-23

Moses and Aaron made 2 preliminary appearances before Pharaoh, before the string of plague-appearances began. In both cases, God was giving Pharaoh a chance to respond by letting Israel go, according to His command. Moses and Aaron's first address to Pharaoh was met with a stern rebuff. In fact, Pharaoh responded by *increasing the burden* on the Hebrew workforce. In turn, the Hebrews blamed Moses and Aaron for only making matters worse.

They said to them, "May the Lord look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us" (5:21).

Confused, Moses complained to the Lord about the situation:

Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people; and You have not delivered Your people at all” (5:22,23).

Oh how often God’s ways with us feel unfair or uncaring. The fact is that God is never unfair or uncaring; rather, He is working in ways that we do not have the ability to understand. One of the great steps of Christian maturity is to be able to trust God when the pathway seems crooked and it feels as if we walk alone.

God’s intentions restated to Moses: 6:1-30

God strongly reaffirmed His intention to bring Israel out of Egypt “*with a mighty hand.*” Twice here He refers to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (6:3,8). Moses went again to the elders of Israel, but they would not listen to him “*because of their despondency and cruel bondage*” (6:9). At this point, God gave to a very reluctant Moses a firm “charge” to go:

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt” 6:13).

There is no turning back from this point forward. Regardless of what Moses and Aaron experience or feel, the Lord *will* bring Israel out and He *will* use the brothers to do it. Chapter 6 concludes with the genealogies of Moses and Aaron.

The second appearance before Pharaoh: 7:1-13

At God’s command, Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh a second time, demanding the release of the Israelites. There was no plague associated with this appearance; instead, an attesting miracle. Age markers are given for both Moses and Aaron.

“Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh” (7:7).

These age markers were not given simply to inform the reader how old Moses and Aaron were; rather, they signal the formal onset of the great mission to which the two men have been called by God. In modern terms we might say: *Game on!*

Moses’ attesting miracle – his staff becoming a snake – was duplicated by the magicians of Egypt. Thus, Pharaoh was

unwilling to listen to their demand to let Israel go.

About “the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart” by God: It is clear throughout the Exodus narrative that God was, in some punitive way, hardening the heart of Pharaoh so that he would not listen to Moses and Aaron. For example:

“You shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt, and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst” (7:2-5).

Two observations to help us understand God’s ways with Pharaoh:

1) In Pharaoh’s case, God did not take a “soft” heart and make it “hard.” God took a hardened heart and confirmed it in its hardness. God Himself attributes to Pharaoh the flaw of a stubborn heart: “*Pharaoh’s heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go*” (7:14). Thus, we should see God’s action as a *judicial hardening* in response to Pharaoh hardening his own heart.

2) The wider purpose of God should not be missed. Because of Pharaoh’s stubborn, unrepentant heart, God used a *mighty hand* to bring Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Thus, “*the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord*” (7:5). God’s ultimate goal was to use Israel to bring a witness of Himself to all nations. The manner of the Exodus was, in fact, a direct assault on the pantheon of Egyptian “gods,” as we will discuss below. Yahweh’s purpose was merciful. He was inviting all of Egypt to behold the one true God. Pharaoh’s hardened heart was a means to a greater end.

The Ten Plagues: 7:14-12:32

Plague 1 – The Nile turned to blood: 7:14-25

Apis and Isis were revered as god and goddess of the great Nile, which formed the lifeblood of Egypt’s economy. Khnum was thought to be the guardian of the Nile. Turning the Nile to blood would have shut down the entire economy of Egypt, thus challenging the power of these gods to sustain and protect Egypt. The magicians of Egypt were again able to replicate this miracle to some degree, giving Pharaoh another excuse to dismiss Moses, Aaron *and* their “God.”

Plague 2 – Frogs: 8:1-15

Heket was the frog-headed goddess of fertility and childbirth. Egyptians believed that she blew the breath of life into the bodies that her husband, the god Khnum, made from the dust of the earth. Frogs were not to be killed in Egypt because they were sacred. When the frogs died, at Moses' command, they were piled up in foul smelling heaps throughout the land.

Plague 3 – Gnats: 8:16-19

Set (or Seth) was revered as god of storms and the desert. Here, the dust of the desert is turned into a terrible plague of gnats (perhaps lice) that covered both man and beast. This plague marked a turning point in the sequence, for the magicians of Egypt were no longer able to duplicate the miracle in any way. Even *they* saw the *hand of God* in this plague:

Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said (8:19).

Plague 4 – Flies: 8:20-32

The Egyptian gods Re and Uatchit were both depicted as flies. Great swarms of flies invaded Egypt, making life unbearable. God made a separation between His people and the Egyptians, so that the swarms of flies did not go into the land of Goshen. Note also the wording as to Pharaoh hardening his own heart: “*But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go*” (8:32).

Plague 5 – Death of livestock: 9:1-7

The Egyptian gods Hathor and Apis were both depicted as cattle. Again, God protected His people from the plague. Pharaoh even sent a delegation to find out if the Israelites were suffering along with the Egyptians (9:7).

Plague 6 – Boils: 9:8-12

Sekhmet, Sunu and Isis were revered as gods of health and disease. Both the Egyptian gods and their representatives were unable to stand before this plague.

“The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians” (9:11).

A warning to Pharaoh before the final plagues: 9:13-21

The first 6 plagues were heavy. The remaining plagues, on the other hand, would be fatal. Thus, Moses was sent to Pharaoh with a special warning from God, prior to the final plagues:

Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go” (9:13-17).

As an act of grace, God instructed Pharaoh to shelter his remaining crops and cattle before the next plague. Some of Pharaoh’s servants feared the word of the Lord and sheltered their servants and cattle; some did not.

“Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Now therefore send, bring your livestock and whatever you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home, when the hail comes down on them, will die” (9:18,19).

Plague 7 – Hailstorm: 9:22-35

Nut was the sky goddess, Osiris the crop god, and Set the storm god. Once again, the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived, was untouched by the hailstorm. This time, it appeared that Pharaoh would repent of his stubborn heart:

Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the Lord, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer” (9:27,28).

Yet, once the plague ceased, he hardened his heart again. Note the wording and the emphasis on Pharaoh’s own culpability for his spiritual condition:

“But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he

and his servants. Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses" (9:34,35).

Plague 8 – Locusts: 10:1-20

Prior to the plague of locusts, Pharaoh's servants pled with him to let Israel go. Yet, he refused even their advice. Once again, the gods Nut, Set and Osiris were all found to be ineffective protectors over Egypt in the locust plague.

Plague 9 – Darkness: 10:21-29

Re, the sun god, and Set his protector, were both defeated in the plague of 3 days of total darkness. Although there was darkness over all of Egypt, there was light in the homes of the Israelites.

Plague 10 – Death of every firstborn/Passover: 11:1-12:32

Isis was revered as the protector of children; but *none* of the Egyptian gods or goddesses could stand against Yahweh's final judgment:

"For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments – I am the Lord" (12:12).

Unlike the other plagues, God warned even the Israelites that *they* would be impacted by this judgment, *unless they exercised faith in God's word*. Each family was to take an unblemished lamb and sacrifice it, putting the blood on the top and sides of the doorway of their home. The angel of death would pass through Egypt at midnight, striking every firstborn of man and beast, except in those homes where the blood of the lamb covered the doorway. The angel of death would "pass over" those homes. Along with the meal of lamb, the Israelites were to prepare unleavened bread (the bread of haste - 12:11) symbolizing the fact that they were dressed and ready to move quickly on the night of Passover.

Much of chapter 12 (vv.1-28) is devoted to God's instructions to memorialize the Passover for all coming generations. The 7-day "Feast of Unleavened Bread," culminating in the celebration of the "Passover" became one of the major annual feasts in the religious life of Israel. It was during the Passover festival that Jesus celebrated His last supper with the disciples, and went to the cross to offer Himself as the substitute sacrifice for the sins of the world. (See additional notes on Passover at end of this section.)

The New Testament teaches that “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us” (1Cor. 5:7). It is the blood of the Lamb of God, applied to the guilty sinner’s heart, that causes the judgment of God to “pass over.” Thus, “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

The Exodus: 12:33-41

After 430 years of captivity in Egypt, Israel came forth on Passover night. This is the defining moment in the entire Old Testament history. The promises to Abraham are now beginning to be fulfilled. The number of men in this newly forming nation was 600,000, making it likely that the total number of Israelites was around 2 million. Repeated emphasis is given on the fact that *this was a night to remember forever.*

“And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be observed for the Lord for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the Lord, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations” (12:41,42).

Consecration of the firstborn: 13:1-16

Since God had spared the firstborn of the Israelites, they now belonged to Him. Thus, God instructed that when they came into the land of Canaan, they were to sacrifice to Him the firstborn male of every animal, while “redeeming” (with an offering) the firstborn of every human.

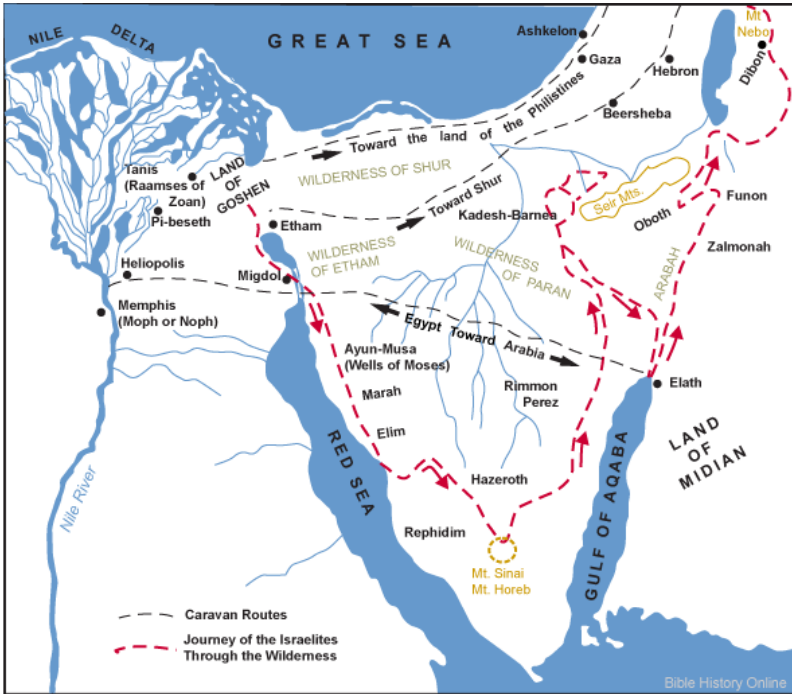
The Lord leads Israel toward the Red Sea: 13:17-14:12

“The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people” (13:21,22).

The route of the Exodus is fascinating. God could have led the Israelites straight east across the caravan routes leading directly to Canaan. Instead, He led them on a southern route until they were up against the Red Sea at Migdol. God’s plan was to bring one final judgment upon Pharaoh for his hardness of heart. He also intended to give Israel one more amazing reason to trust Him in the journey ahead.

“Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord” (14:4).

Sometimes, God leads us “the hard way” so that He can show up in our lives in ways that are unusually BIG! His power becomes most visible at our points of weakness (2Corinthians 12:9).



Israel passes through the Red Sea: 14:13-31

Pharaoh’s army had the Israelites trapped up against the Red Sea. Or so they thought. When Moses lifted the staff of God, the Red Sea parted and Israel “passed through on dry ground.” When Pharaoh sent his army in pursuit, however, they were destroyed as God brought the waters down upon them. As a result, the Israelites had a new attitude toward both God and Moses:

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses” (14:30,31).

The Song of Moses: 15:1-21

Here we encounter one of the earliest “psalms” (songs) in the Bible – the one that Israel sang once they had crossed the Red Sea safely. It is a salvation song focusing on the unique character of Yahweh and how He powerfully acted to protect His people from the strong enemy. Miriam, Moses’ sister (here called a “prophetess”) led the women in song.

Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and said, “I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; my father’s God, and I will extol Him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name” (15:1-3).

Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. Miriam answered them, “Sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea” (15:20-21).

Sadly, Moses’ wife Zipporah missed out on the greatest ministry partnership with her husband, and one of the greatest events in all of biblical history because of her unwillingness to submit to God’s decree. She had been sent away after their earlier conflict over circumcision (4:24f). She reappeared in Exodus 18:2-6 when her father brought her to Moses with their 2 sons.

Migration of Israel to Mt. Sinai: 15:22-18:27

After exiting Egypt, God began to move Israel toward Mt. Sinai where He would enter into a formal covenant relationship with them. While the events of these two months were transitional, they provide the first “hints” that Israel’s journey toward the Promised Land will be much longer and more difficult than expected. Three major themes emerge from this section.

- Israel’s persistent grumbling.

Even during the first 2 months after the Exodus, the people of Israel began to reveal a consistently stubborn and ungrateful heart. Note how often they grumbled against God:

When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” (15:23,24).

Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (16:1-3).

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst" (17:1-3)?

The people of Israel, through their constant grumbling, set into motion a pattern of displeasing God that would ultimately lead to His judgment against them. They would finally be consigned to wandering in the wilderness *for 40 years*, until they all *died in the desert* because of their lack of trust in the character of God (see Numbers 14:22,23 where God refers to "ten times" that the Israelites rebelled against Him by refusing to listen to His voice).

- God's consistent provision.

In spite of Israel's constant grumbling, God continued to faithfully provide for His people. Most significantly, there is the daily provision of bread (manna) from heaven.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily" (16:4,5).

The house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey. Then Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded, 'Let an omerful of

it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.” Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations.” As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept. The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan” (16:31-35).

Note the last line and the mention of the “forty years.” This is an editorial comment that allows the reader to step out of the immediate narrative and see the bigger story. The actual judgment of the forty years of wandering will not come until Numbers 14:22,23. Yet, we see now how these immediate events tie in to the bigger story.

Jesus likened Himself to the heaven-sent manna. Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread. Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst” (John 6:32-35).

- Moses’ struggles/God’s strength.

We begin to see in these interim events just how difficult it was for Moses to shepherd the people of God. He struggled with their stubborn hearts and, at times, grew weary of the weight of his leadership responsibilities.

So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me” (17:4).

In Israel’s first battle as a nation, everything depended upon Moses holding up the staff over the battlefield as they fought. Yet, his arms grew heavy:

“So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword” (17:11-13).

As he sat daily to mediate the disputes among the people, he nearly wore himself out. It was the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, that helped him to spread the burden to 70 other faithful men.

Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone" (18:13-18).

Once again, these events are more than just events; they are clues as to what will happen in the larger story. Moses' endless struggle to shepherd this stubborn flock will, in one crisis moment, cause him to lose patience, take his eyes off of God, and disobey God (Numbers 20:2-13). Even Moses, the great man of God, will be consigned to death in the desert because of an act of rebellion against God. Yet, this early part of the narrative suggests that Moses' fatal sin was tied directly to the burden of shepherding a constantly rebellious people.

Self-care is critical when you are called to lead. The weaknesses and the sins of others can wear you down, leading you to sin. When we fail to maintain the fire of our own devotion to God, we set ourselves up for a fall. And the fall can happen in a split-second, without warning. Moses did not wake up on that fateful day thinking: "Today I think I will sin against God." No, but in the pressure of the moment, his flesh took over . . . and his lifelong dream of leading Israel into the Promised Land went up in smoke.

Addendum: The Passover

(Notes adapted from Paul Tanner, my colleague in the Philippines, 1984.)

The setting for the Passover was the 10th plague upon Egypt, in which all the 1st born in the land of Egypt were under a sentence of death, including the 1st born in Israel, unless the necessary ritual was embraced by faith and performed exactly God instructed. Israel, as a nation, was being redeemed . . . delivered from an earthly bondage to become the people of God. The Passover event was central to God's process for their redemption.

The Passover is a picture of our redemption today, as we are rescued from bondage to sin and to Satan, and purchased with the blood of Christ to be God's own possession. The Passover lamb is a clear picture of Christ and His suffering for us; the price God paid for our redemption.

The slaying of the lamb (Exodus 12:1-7)

Each family was to take a lamb and prepare it for the Passover meal. The lamb for the Passover had to be an “unblemished male a year old.” This strict requirement reflected the need for a sacrificial substitute that was acceptable to a holy, perfect God. Of course, no animal ever fulfilled the requirement perfectly; God was simply anticipating the perfect sacrifice that He would someday provide – the sinless Son of God. As John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus: “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29,36).

The whole assembly of Israel was to kill the lamb at twilight. “The orthodox piety of Pharisaic Judaism understood the meaning as between the time in the afternoon when the heat of the sun lessens (3-4p.m.) and sunset” (IVP Commentary, p.106). Josephus (a Jewish historian in the time of Christ) noted that it was the custom in his day to offer the lamb at about three o'clock in the afternoon. It is no mere coincidence that Jesus was crucified on the occasion of Passover. The New Testament also informs us that His death was between the hours of 3-6 in the afternoon.

Exodus instructs that no bone of the lamb was to be broken. The Roman soldiers did not break the bones of Jesus, as they commonly did to hasten the death of the crucified (Jn. 19:33). The fact that the entire congregation of Israel was to participate in the sacrificial ritual and meal reflects the fact that all share responsibility for the death of the lamb. Likewise, we all are responsible for the death of the Lamb of God, Jesus. It is my sins and yours that put Jesus on the cross.

The sprinkling of the lamb's blood on the doorposts was the requisite act of faith. This pictured the price that the lamb paid in order to protect that house from the judgment of God *and the acceptance by that household of God's gracious provision for their salvation.* Similarly, we are responsible to *accept by faith the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross for our sins.* In this way, we are symbolically sprinkling the blood of Jesus on the door of our hearts, asking God to “pass over” our sins.

“You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18,19).

The supper of the lamb (Exodus 12:8-13)

The Passover meal consisted of three parts:

1. Eating of the roasted lamb. The lamb was to be roasted with fire before being eaten. Often in the OT, fire is used to depict divine judgment and such is the case here. The lamb is bearing the judgment of God against human sin.

2. Unleavened bread. The unleavened bread represented Israel’s hasty departure from Egypt. The New Testament develops the thought further by associating “leaven” with sin. As believers, we need to separate from “the old leaven” (old way of life) and align ourselves in new ways with “Christ our Passover” lamb.

“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1Corinthians 5:6-8).

3. Bitter herbs. The bitter herbs were a reminder of the bitterness of Israel’s long bondage in Egypt. Similarly, as Christians we must never lose sight of the bitterness of our former bondage to sin . . . and we must never turn back to that old life.

The dress for the meal also had implications. They were to eat the meal with their loins girded (i.e., their running clothes on), their sandals on, and their staff in hand. In short, they were to be a people ready to move swiftly into the life ahead that God has prepared for them. Similarly, Jesus not only invites us to be forgiven children; but also devoted followers (disciples) who will take up the cross and follow Him anywhere, at any cost.